

Dancing into Life: Affective Ontogenesis in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain**

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Abstract

Philip Roth's 2000 novel, *The Human Stain*, is widely considered a novel about racial passing. However, such a view assumes that Coleman Silk, a light-skinned African American who lives most of his life as a white Jew, is the sole protagonist of the story at the expense of Zuckerman, who, as the narrator and self-proclaimed author of *The Human Stain*, is no less important than Coleman to the novel. The novel details how Zuckerman abandons his self-imposed seclusion and becomes reintegrated into human relationships after a spontaneous dance with Coleman. Granting equal importance to Coleman and Zuckerman will reveal that Roth's concern in the novel is not only the historical phenomenon of racial passing but subjectivation in general.

To understand the instances of ontogenesis in *The Human Stain*, this essay proposes an affective materialist perspective, one that, instead of focusing on the macro-level of social structures, as previous criticism on the novel has done, turns to what can be considered the quantum level of pre-perceptual matter. Such a perspective is provided by affect theory, for which subjectivity is always embodied and subjectivation is galvanized by active, creative matter.

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This paper argues that the 19-year-old Coleman's racial passing and Zuckerman's self-imposed seclusion, based on a mixture of the modern humanist concept of self-invention and the postmodern belief in the body as text, exemplify an idealist conception of ontogenesis that is destined to ossification and sterility. In contrast, the 71-year-old Coleman's unexpected transformation after meeting Faunia and Zuckerman's revitalization through the dance with Coleman illustrate that embodied subjectivation through affection is the truly productive ontogenesis, which leads to continual openness and creativity.

Keywords: Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*, affect, embodiment, ontogenesis

Philip Roth's 2000 novel, *The Human Stain*, revolves around the life and death of Coleman Silk, a retired classics professor for whom Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's longtime narrator, is a neighbor and confidant. Since Coleman is a light-skinned African American who has lived most of his life as a white Jew, *The Human Stain* is widely considered a novel about racial passing.¹ However, such views assume that Coleman is the sole protagonist of the story at the expense of Zuckerman, who, as the narrator and self-proclaimed author of *The Human Stain*, is no less important than Coleman to the novel. *The Human Stain* is also a story about Zuckerman's passage out of self-imposed seclusion. When both Coleman and Zuckerman are put into focus, it becomes clear that the novel is about a different kind of passing, not the kind that reassigns a person from one racial category to another but passing as movement and process—in other words, passing as the mobility that relates individuals with each other and with their environment with creative results. This is the sense of passing in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, where the affective mobility to go past the status quo toward the new and unknown is a kind of health (Deleuze, *Pure Immanence* 58). Granting equal importance to Coleman and Zuckerman will reveal that Roth's concern in the novel is not only the historical phenomenon of racial passing but also the regeneration of subjectivity, or subjectivation, which both Coleman and Zuckerman experience in the course of the story.²

As a novel about subjectivity, which, Roth has stated, is the most important subject for him throughout his career, *The Human Stain* has generated much interpretation about what it is that creates subjectivity (Sheppard qtd. in Shostak 3). Recent criticism has mainly dwelled on the tension between liberal humanist self-invention on the one hand and the domination of the individual by historical and social forces on the other. As Jeremy Green argues, the novel portrays the ambiguity of subjectivity as both self-invention and “thoroughly conditioned by cultural and social forces” (70). Debra Shostak points out that Coleman's belief in the American myth of individualist self-authoring proves misguided, as Roth shows a “deeply deterministic view” that “subjectivity is . . . a historical product”

¹ For examples of recent criticism on the subject of passing in the novel, see Moynihan, Elam, Maslan, and Rankine.

² In Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, being is so constantly self-differentiating that it is conceptualized as becoming. Accordingly, Deleuze replaces the traditional notion of the subject as a “fixed substance” with the processual subject, “the provisional outcome of a process of subjectivation” (Boundas 274). Since this essay has adopted Deleuzian affect theory as its main interpretive perspective, and, moreover, using the term “subjectivity” in a Deleuzian context brings with it modern humanist implications at odds with Deleuze's philosophy, I will henceforth use the term subjectivation instead of “the regeneration of subjectivity” to refer to ontological transformation or regeneration. I thank an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of the essay for alerting me to the terminological issue.

(258, 18). Derek Parker Royal notes the inexorability of the individual from familial and ethnic histories, arguing that Coleman's tragedy stems from his disavowal of his "actual family" and ethnic "heredity" for the pursuit of self-reinvention (137). Timothy Parrish draws attention to the ending of the novel, where Zuckerman is on his way to take Coleman's place at the Silks' family dinner, as endorsing the view that subjectivity is as much a matter of history and ethnicity as of self-invention. By joining Coleman's black family, Zuckerman is also joining his own Jewish one, accepting "the history of Jews before him who made his story possible" (139).

By stressing the inescapability of race and ethnicity for Coleman and Zuckerman, these critics see *The Human Stain* as providing a materialist corrective to the idealist concept of subjectivity exemplified by Coleman's liberal humanist pursuit of individual freedom. Although they provide convincing explanations for the tragic consequences of Coleman's racial passing, they have less to say about his positive, albeit short-lived, subjectivation in his septuagenarian years. They also leave Zuckerman's subjectivation—his reintegration into human relationships—unexplained.

To understand these positive instances of ontogenesis, this essay proposes a different kind of materialist perspective, one that, instead of focusing on the macro-level of history and social structures, turns to what can be considered the quantum level of pre-perceptual matter. Such a perspective is provided by affect theory, for which subjectivity is always embodied and subjectivation is galvanized by active, creative matter.

"Affect" is admittedly a loaded term with no categorical definition. However, according to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg in *The Affect Theory Reader*, the current strands of affect theory are inspired by either "Silvan Tomkins's psychobiology of differential affects" or "Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities" (5). In this essay, my use of the word "affect" coheres with the latter variant, where affects are not innate, as they are in Tomkins, but relational, referring to what bodies do to each other. Inspired by Baruch Spinoza's view of ethics as ethology, Deleuze defines the body by its affective capabilities, or "what a body can do" (*Expressionism* 218). Here the term "body," which Deleuze uses synonymously with "individual," refers to a network of relations. Affect is the change bodies induce in each other as they come into relations. Such change, lying below the threshold of sensation, is more skin to Leibnizian minute perception than conscious apperception.³ Bodies include not only material objects but also what are con-

³ See Leibniz lxxvii.

ventionally considered ideas and concepts, since Deleuze's philosophy of auto-poietic matter, or what Jane Bennett calls "material vitalism," has obviated the idea-matter dichotomy (6). This conception of affect as relational and immanent in matter coheres with Roth's challenge to the mind-body dualism and his avowal of embodiment, a point I will elaborate later.

What should be clear first of all is that affect is not to be confused with feeling or emotion, both of which are personal and conscious. As Brian Massumi puts it, affect is "an ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvi). Seigworth and Gregg also stress the pre-personal and non-conscious nature of affect: "Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*" (2; emphasis in original). Their characterization of affect as force recalls Nietzsche's conception of energy or power simply as overcoming resistance, which undoes the dichotomy between the mental and the physical.⁴

Approaching ontogenesis in *The Human Stain* from the perspective of affect means paying attention to the less conspicuous aspects of the story—not the spectacular tragedy of Coleman's exile from reputable society, but the imperceptible drama of minute matter; not racial passing but what readers often glance through in passing—location, atmosphere, objects, and slight physical interactions. As Seigworth and Gregg note, "affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-" (2). An affective perspective brings to the surface the subterranean happenings often skimmed over in readers' pursuit of representational, thematic meanings. Recognizing the importance of affect to ontogenesis helps us to uncover the creative potential of pre-discursive, non-representational matter and to understand the difference between the instances of subjectivation that Coleman and Zuckerman undergo respectively during the course of the story.

Providing an affective materialist perspective, this essay argues that the 19-year-old Coleman's racial passing and Zuckerman's self-imposed seclusion, based on a mixture of the modern humanist concept of self-invention and the post-modern belief in the body as text, exemplify an idealist conception of ontogenesis that is destined to ossification and sterility. In contrast, the 71-year-old Coleman's unexpected transformation after meeting Faunia and Zuckerman's revitalization through an impromptu dance with Coleman illustrate that embodied subjectiva-

⁴ See Reginster 127 and 143.

tion through affection is the truly productive ontogenesis, which leads to continual openness and creativity.

Before delving into an interpretation of *The Human Stain* from the perspective of affect, this essay will first look at Roth's stance on the materiality of the body in two of his earlier works: the 1962 short story "Novotny's Pain" and the 1983 novel *The Anatomy Lesson*. These two works, representing the early and middle stages of Roth's career respectively, signal Roth's sustained repudiation of the mind-body dualism and his belief in embodiment, which aligns him with the immanent materialist perspective of affect theory. I will then interpret *The Human Stain* as juxtaposing two kinds of ontogenesis—as idealist, textual self-invention and as material, embodied affection—to show that Roth portrays the latter as truly creative. In the conclusion, I will discuss what the affective materialist perspective implies for the scholarship on Roth's later works.

In both "Novotny's Pain" and *The Anatomy Lesson*, Roth challenges the idealist approach to bodily phenomena. "Novotny's Pain" follows the eponymous protagonist's efforts to relieve himself of an inexplicable back pain. Novotny, a young Chicagoan, has just been drafted into the army during the Korean War when he becomes afflicted with back pain. Much to his frustration, the army doctors cannot find anything wrong with him.

Desperate to become well again, Novotny entertains "the fantasy of reaching inside himself and cutting out of his body the offending circle of pain. He saw himself standing over his own naked back and twisting down on an instrument that resembled the little utensil that is sold in dime stores to remove the core of a grapefruit" (53). While feeling detached from his own body, Novotny cannot but recognize that his pain, or, by extension, his body, is the inextricable "core" of his being.

Totally helpless, Novotny wonders to himself whether his physical pain has a theological cause. Maybe God is punishing him for his sexual relationship with his girlfriend: "Was he being punished for being so happy with her? Were they being punished for all that sex?" (53). However, Novotny ultimately rejects this explanation as "he was not the kind of Catholic who believed in Hell; he was not the kind who was afraid of sex. All he wanted was his chance at life. That was all" (53). Novotny does not believe that his body is a vessel of punishment by God or his own conscience.

If Novotny refrains from giving his ailment a religious interpretation, the army does not hesitate to ascribe it to moral asthenia. As the back idiomatically represents a person's ability to take up burden and responsibility, Novotny's back pain is seen to result from his lack of moral backbone. The doctors and his army superiors all dismiss his condition, saying, "Everybody's back hurts" (50). Novotny's

problem seems to them self-indulgent. That “there were men in Korea who had much worse . . . was the statement that everyone finally made to him” (51). The colonel even accuses Novotny of egocentrism. He scolds the young soldier: “Haven’t you ever heard of self-sacrifice?” (56).

The army doctor suspects the pain results from a combination of moral and psychological weaknesses. When Novotny “tried to explain that . . . the pain wasn’t on the surface but deep inside his back,” “The doctor said it was deep inside his head” and “told him to go back to duty like a man” (51). Such psychologization of physical afflictions, a tendency prevalent since modernity, as Susan Sontag maintains, creates a sense of control over the uncontrollable matter. The “‘reality’ of a disease . . . has to be explained. (It really means; or is a symbol of; or must be interpreted so.)” (Sontag 55). The urge to psychologize physical debilitation, “That ineluctably material reality,” comes from the desire to assert a presumed supremacy of the mind, or spirit, over matter (56). Physical debilitation is thus explained away as an epiphenomenon of primary, psychological flaws.

In the end, Novotny is discharged after the military psychiatrist diagnoses him as being a “passive-aggressive,” a term meaning, the colonel informs him, “Just another kind of coward” (Roth, “Novotny’s” 55). Any reader’s lingering suspicion that Novotny’s pain is caused by his fear of the battlefield is laid to rest, when, in the closing paragraphs, the narrator assures us that Novotny continues to have the unaccountable back pain even to this day, many years after his discharge. However, the pain has ceased being as debilitating as before because Novotny has learned to live with it.

No longer trying to get a diagnosis, Novotny accepts the back pain as an idiosyncrasy of his body, something that requires no explanation. What it does require is attuning his lifestyle to the material peculiarities of his back: “When the other men in Park Forest go bowling on Friday nights, Novotny stays home, for he tries not to put strains upon his body to which he has decided it is not equal. In a way, all the awfulness of those Army days has boiled down to that—no bowling” (56). As he adjusts his daily activities to his back pain, Novotny acknowledges the inescapability of embodiment.

In his 1983 novel, *The Anatomy Lesson*, Roth revisits the theme of embodiment through Nathan Zuckerman’s undiagnosable back pain.⁵ Like Novotny, Zuckerman rejects transcendent, psychical explanations for his bodily affliction. However, in this more complicated story, Zuckerman has a harder time accepting embodiment than Novotny does.

⁵ Debra Shostak notes the theme of embodiment that connects these two works (42).

Intense pain challenges the mind-body, subject-object dualism by showing up the limit of the subject's power over the objectified body. "Pain heaves the ego down from the pedestal" and gives the lie to the transcendence of the mind over the body (Vetlesen 52). As Vetlesen states, "the pain by means of its body-located reality transforms my whole being into immanence, since every attempt to go beyond (transcend) it becomes impossible" (57). The immanence of the mind and the body is exactly what Zuckerman experiences in his unremitting back pain. His self has no other content but the pain: "Had he kept a pain diary, the only entry would have been one word: Myself" (Roth, *Anatomy* 232).

Having seen all kinds of physicians and therapists to no avail, Zuckerman decides to try psychoanalysis. The back pain, his analyst tells him, is a "hysterical conversion symptom," a form of self-laceration for having sent his parents to early graves with his scandalous novel *Carnovsky* (24). However, "Zuckerman wasn't buying it," responding to the diagnosis by walking out on the therapy session (35). Through Zuckerman, "Roth questions the very notion of hysterical symptoms, the psychoanalytic doctrine according to which somatic phenomena always *mean*" (Shostak 41).⁶ From the perspective of psychoanalysis, Zuckerman's "causeless, nameless, untreatable phantom disease" is a vehicle for his unconscious to punish him for his filial crimes and, insofar as it stops him from writing, to prevent him from further offenses (Roth, *Anatomy* 28; Shostak 34-35). An indignant Zuckerman avers:

Everybody wants to make pain interesting—first the religions, then the poets, then, not to be left behind, even the doctors getting in on the act with their psychosomatic obsession. They want to give it significance. What does it mean? What are you hiding? What are you showing? It's impossible to suffer just the pain, you have to suffer its meaning. But it's not interesting and it has no meaning—it's just plain stupid pain. (Roth, *Anatomy* 200)

As Zuckerman rebuffs the religious meaning of physical suffering professed by George Herbert's poem, "The Collar," in the opening pages of the novel, so now he rejects the "reductive symbolism" of Freudian conversion theory (5-6; Medin 69).

Avowing that his pain is not "interesting" but "plain" and "stupid," Zuckerman would have agreed that hysteria is simply the "pure presence of the body," as Deleuze argues. Rejecting idealist interpretations, Deleuze maintains that hysterical symptoms are actually cellular operations beneath the organic level of the

⁶ Richard Webster identifies the 19th-century French neurologist J. M. Charcot as the first person to explain medically inexplicable phenomena by "unconscious symptom-formation," which is the foundation of hysteria. Charcot had significant influence on the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, one of his students.

person. They are forces working directly on the subterranean depth of the body: "Everywhere there is a presence acting directly on the nervous system, which makes representation . . . impossible" (*Francis Bacon* 44). These seemingly uncaused phenomena are happenings of the "flesh and nerve" unassimilable into "the bounds of organic activity" (40). The "excessive presence" of the corporeal body, "its rhythms, vibrations and paroxysms"—in other words, its intensities—resists representation (44; Geyskens 227).

Zuckerman refuses to psychologize his bodily pain, but it does not follow that he fully embraces his own embodiment. To reconcile himself to his own embodiment, he also has to accept its corollary—mortality, which the back pain, as well as the recent deaths of his parents, has brought into focus. However, Zuckerman's first response to pain and mortality is to revert to an idealist, humanist approach founded on the self's transcendence over the body. Harboring "a sick man's delusion about healing himself," Zuckerman decides to enroll in medical school (Roth, *Anatomy* 171). In his desperation, Zuckerman consults his college friend and physician Bobby Freytag on medical school application. As Gillian Haddow notes, Western medicine has been dominated by Cartesian self-body dualism (97). Abandoning the Aristotelian belief in nature as ensouled, Descartes reconceptualized the universe as "devoid of subjectivity and intention" and the human body as "passive matter driven by mechanical forces" (Leder 20). Wishing to practice medicine to cure his back pain and beat mortality in the battle of "Life vs. Death. Health vs. Disease," Zuckerman clearly subscribes to the Cartesian disembodiment of self and the humanist subject's transcendent mastery of the lifeless, mechanical body (Roth, *Anatomy* 202).

Accompanying Freytag's father on a visit to the grave of the old man's recently deceased wife, a drug-and-alcohol-addled Zuckerman passes out, falling flat on his face against a headstone and breaking his jaw. Lying unconscious amid the dead in the cemetery, where the snow keeps falling on his body and the bodies of the dead alike, constitutes a fortuitous foretaste of death that helps Zuckerman come to terms with his mortality.

When he comes to in the hospital, Zuckerman finds himself unable to speak because of his mouth injury. Instead of a speaking organ, he has a "huge, echoing hole" (263). Drawing from Emile Benveniste's linguistics, Shostak notes that subjectivity is constructed through language, or, more specifically, the act of saying "I" (31-32). In his silence, Zuckerman is deprived of the status of the speaking subject that enables him to subjugate the body under medical discourse. Zuckerman appears to have learned to accept "what is coming," that "illness is a message from the grave . . . You and your body are one" (Roth, *Anatomy* 254). From this point onward, there is no longer any mention of Zuckerman's back pain. If Zucker-

man's predecessor, Novotny, serves as a guide, it can be inferred that Zuckerman has also learned to live with the pure presence of his body. This surmise is borne out by the closing paragraph of the novel, where a convalescing Zuckerman no longer wants to pursue medicine or transcend his embodiment: he no longer "believed that he could unchain himself from a future as a man apart and escape the corpus that was his" (291).

Judging from these earlier works, it is clear that Roth has long disputed the Cartesian notion of mind-body dualism and the transcendence of mind over matter. In *The Human Stain*, Roth not only reasserts the immanence of mind and matter but goes on to portray the process of subjectivation through affects—pre-discursive material intensity that is abundant in vitality. In this 2000 novel, Coleman, a former classics professor at the fictional Athena College in Massachusetts, has gone through two major transformations in his life. The first is his racial passing at 19, and the second is his falling in love with thirtysomething menial laborer Faunia Farley. Coleman's first transformation exemplifies the idealist, autonomous creation typical of the modern humanist concept of subjectivity.

Coleman fully subscribes to another bulwark of humanist modernity: individualism unhindered by family, class, or race. After being humiliated as a "nigger" by a hot dog peddler and thrown out of a brothel for being black, Coleman realizes that, in other people's eyes, he is not an individual but a specimen of the black race (Roth, *Human* 102, 114). Traumatized, Coleman decides to seek individualist freedom not only from his racial group, but from all groups: "Overnight the raw I was part of a we with all of the we's overbearing solidarity, and he didn't want anything to do with it or with the next oppressive we that came along either He was Coleman, the greatest of the great *pioneers* of the I" (108). He resolves never to be oppressed or constricted by any racial category: "He saw the fate awaiting him, and he wasn't having it You can't let the big they impose its bigotry on you any more than you can let the little they become a we and impose its ethics on you" (108). An individualist, he has as little tolerance for black society's moral demand on him as for white society's discrimination against him. In contrast to his dark-skinned elder brother Walter, who has a strong sense of racial belonging and works for the freedom of all African Americans, Coleman wants nothing to do with any race but aspires to transcend racial categories: "All he'd ever wanted . . . was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free" (120). However, in the 1940s American society, Coleman's "passionate struggle for singularity," "to be his particular I," and to acquire the greatest possible level of individual freedom entails for him a relabeling of himself as white (109, 108).

Coleman's belief in individualism and being "his particular I" would later

impart on him a blindness to the prevalence of passing in his time. Living as white in the cosmopolitan Greenwich Village, New York City, after World War II, Coleman, then in his early twenties, believes himself a unique pioneer of passing. The observation of his black girlfriend, Ellie, that "There's one on every other block. You're so vain, you thought you'd dreamed it up yourself," causes Coleman to leave her in order to preserve his individualist delusion (135).

Subjectivation through racial passing is largely a matter of textual performance in Coleman's case. Pivotal to Coleman's decision to pass is the death of his father. Without the family patriarch, "who had been making up Coleman's story for him," Coleman is free to create his own story, his own textualization of the body (107). The key to successful passing, Coleman has realized, lies in making up a credible biography: "all you have to do is give a pretty good and consistent line about yourself and nobody ever inquires" (131).

The idea of passing has first been suggested to him by his boxing coach, Doc Chizner, when he trained as a teenage boxer. On the way to meet the boxing team coach of a university for which Coleman was trying to get a scholarship, Chizner instructs the young man to refrain from mentioning his racial identity: "If nothing comes up, . . . you don't bring it up. You're neither one thing or [sic] the other. You're Silky Silk. That's enough" (98). Chizner's advice exposes the contradiction inherent in humanist individualism: being "Silky Silk" is clearly not enough; Coleman also has to be white. The humanism that upholds the ideal of individualist freedom came about precisely through white people's exclusion of non-whites. As Sartre argues, "the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters" out of other ethnic groups (26).

This episode shows Coleman that, thanks to his light beige skin, his racial identity can be a matter of discursive performance; he "could play his skin however he wanted, color himself just as he chose" (Roth, *Human* 109). The autonomous subject could discursively control the passive, objectified body through its ability to tell stories. To make himself "a perfect one-of-a-kind creation," Coleman decides to pass definitively as a Jew by marrying the Jewish Iris Gittelman and severing all ties to his black family (131). For "the medium through which to make himself anew," Coleman chooses Iris because her features fit the biography he has invented. With hair that is a "billowing wreath of spirals and ringlets," Iris would help him avoid exposing his black identity (129). Indeed, "all that he had ever wanted from Iris Gittelman was the explanation her appearance could provide for the texture of their children's hair" (136).

Coleman's racial passing is a discursive, disembodied form of subjectivation. Racial passing is itself strongly discursive and performative, achieved through reiterated enactment of white cultural norms. As Nadine Ehlers points out, passing

“challenges accepted beliefs that race is . . . transparent and visually embodied. The act of passing represents a dissonance between the external racial signification of skin and the supposed internal racial truth that is made to inhere in blood” (124). In Coleman’s case, passing is deeply discursive, involving not simply “claiming a New Jersey Jewish boyhood” but immersing himself in the very foundation of white culture as a classics professor. His repeated allusions to figures from Greek and Roman mythologies, such as Zeus and Voluptas, in everyday conversations attest to his strong self-identification with European culture. He also chooses to place himself in such a white-dominated professional environment as Athena College in Massachusetts, which is “As white a college as there was in New England” (Roth, *Human* 336). Culturally, “Coleman is more white than the whites” (336).

His passing is successful, and yet, too successful. Except for occasional, secret phone conversations with his sister, Ernestine, Coleman has no contact with his family and his past. Coleman’s downfall in his late sixties following the “spooks” incident results from the rigidification of subjectivity following a radical ontogenesis based on the discursive model. Six weeks into a new semester, Coleman finds that two students have never shown up for class. Displeased, he asks the class, “Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?” (6). Later the same day he is called into the dean of faculty’s office to face charges of racism by the missing students, who happen to be black. In the ensuing embroilment, Coleman loses everything. He is forced to retire, whereas Iris dies of a stroke fighting for his reputation.

As Jennifer Glaser points out, Coleman has become “colorblind” because of his abandonment of the realm of the body and racial lineage for the ideal, “transcendent realm of the intellect” (1473). His self-isolation in the “extraideological universe of classical literature” has completely desensitized him to racial issues (1473). He tries to defend himself by claiming that he was “using the word in its customary and primary meaning: ‘spook’ as a specter or a ghost,” but he also admits that “I had known perhaps fifty years ago but had wholly forgotten that ‘spooks’ is an invidious term sometimes applied to blacks” (Roth, *Human* 6). The protest shows the thoroughness of his passing, so thorough that, despite having himself been the victim of racial slurs, he has become oblivious to discriminatory language. Coleman’s discursive form of subjectivation ultimately leads to a return of the repressed that forces him to reacknowledge the body as racialized.

Like Coleman, Zuckerman enforced a strictly idealist subjectivation, with the result of artistic sterility. Before making friends with Coleman, Zuckerman has lived in self-imposed seclusion for three years, as he considered himself, over sixty years old, no longer capable of dealing with the complexities of life that come from human

relationships. He chooses to confine himself to the life of the intellect only. The only communication he has is the idealist “communications of a solitary mind with itself” in the form of writing (44). His daily sustenance is written words, “the wisdom of the brilliant deceased,” gleaned from reading and rereading his favorite books (44). It is a life direly devoid of embodied connections with other lives, filled “with nothing but the daily demands of work, . . . nothing but solid work” (43). Occupied with writing only, Zuckerman would “have not even a life of [his] own to care about, let alone somebody else’s” (43).

Early in his seclusion, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent surgery, which left him impotent and incontinent. The disruption in normal bodily functions draws attention to the body and reveals the modernist disembodied subjective autonomy to be an untenable delusion. According to Jason L. Powell and Azrini Wahidin, “Through pain, disability, illness and death, our normal modes of bodily disappearance tend to become profoundly disrupted. The body, in other words, becomes a central aspect of experience, albeit in an alien form: it dis-appears,” seeming to “appear in a dysfunctional state” (141). Suffering from incontinence, Zuckerman feels that he is no longer a full human subject transcending and controlling his physical body:

of course, I was habituated to being a free and easy, dry and odorless adult possessing an adult’s mastery of the body’s elemental functions, someone who for some sixty years had gone about his everyday business unworried about the status of his underclothes I still despair to think that the contingency that virtually defines the infant state will never be alleviated. (Roth, *Human* 36)

For Zuckerman, losing control of his body equals losing subjectivity and a regression into infancy.

Rather than acknowledging his embodiment, Zuckerman makes a redoubled endeavor to recuperate his subjective autonomy by closely monitoring and controlling his unruly body. He checks his underclothes regularly and masters self-care regimens that reduce the disruptive bodily condition to “ordinary inconvenience” (36). At the same time, he maintains the “rigorous reclusion . . . away from all agitating entanglements, allurements, and expectations,” and makes it a habit to “organize the silence” of his everyday existence into reading and writing (43–44, 44). Zuckerman’s attempt to transcend embodiment and his subscription to the Romantic myth of the solitary writer ultimately has a withering effect on his writing. Never shy about mentioning his writings and even including entire pieces in his narratives,⁷ Zuckerman is tellingly vague about the “solid work” he

⁷ The chapter titled “Femme Fatale” in *The Ghost Writer*, Zuckerman’s undelivered eulogy to Henry in *The Counterlife*, and his high school reunion speech manuscript in *American Pastoral* are some examples.

is currently doing. It is highly likely that the life of the mind without the body has not fueled his artistic endeavors.

Coleman's transformation into a white Jew and Zuckerman's transformation into a would-be solitary genius are both instances of subjectivation guided by the belief in a disembodied, "coherent, rational self, the right of that self to autonomy and freedom, and a sense of agency linked with a belief in enlightened self-interest" (Hayles 85-86). In other words, these are instances of liberal humanist self-authorship. In Deleuzian philosophy, this mode of ontogenesis is not truly creative because it relies on the "rigid segmentarity" of pre-existing identity categories (Deleuze and Parnet 124): "Segments depend on binary machines . . . of social classes; of sexes, man-woman; of ages, child-adult; of races, black-white; of sectors, public-private; of subjectivations, ours-not ours" (128). These binarisms are *a priori* signifiers maintained at the expense of haecceities. Nothing is left uncategorized. On the "line of rigid segmentarity," "everything seems calculable and foreseen, the beginning and end of a segment, the passage from one segment to another" (Deleuze and Guattari 195). Subjectivation following the route of "rigid segmentarity" is total transformation from one clearly delineated identity or status to another, such as the renunciation of one nationality to acquire another. Since this way of genesis has goals and modes already laid out in advance, it is not genuinely creative.

To be fair, Coleman's racial passing does not start out on a rigid polar dichotomy but traces a line of what Deleuze would call "supple" segmentarity, which "recognizes the multiple and malleable segmentations that define us according to more finely grained determinations" (Frohmann 59). Coleman's choice of Jewishness as his racial identity shows that he understands that there is a range of variations within racial binaries. Because of their history as a wandering race, Jews have also been attributed with "racial chameleonism" (Itzkovitz 40). For African Americans, Jews serve as not only the model for assimilation into the white society but also the intermediary between racial opposites (Glaser 1470).⁸ However, ontogenesis on the premise of such attenuated segmentarity, likened to "little modifications" and "detours," tends to ossify, turning the boundaries between social strata inflexible again (Deleuze and Parnet 124). Thus, Coleman's passing starts out supple and chameleonic but soon ossifies into one pole of the black-white binary.

In Deleuze's philosophy, for subjectivation to be genuinely creative, it has to trace a trajectory free from segmentarity, a trajectory that Deleuze calls "line of flight." As Deleuze argues, "it is always on a line of flight that we create" (Deleuze

⁸ In *The Human Stain*, Doc Chizner, dentist by day and boxing coach by night, and Dr. Fensterman, a successful surgeon at a time of "discriminatory quotas . . . designed to keep Jews out of medical school" are prominent examples (86).

and Parnet 135). Only the line of flight can take the individual out of fixed identities and sedimented status quo. Unlike suppleness, which involves only slight modification of a segment, opening a slight crack on its borders, the line of flight is a “clean break,” a “rupture,” from all strata or identities (Deleuze and Guattari 199). It leads not to the relatively new, but the radically novel. In Deleuze’s geological metaphor, it is “Absolute deterritorialization,” totally uprooting an individual from its identity category and sending it flying with no predetermined destination in sight (200). Traveling on a line of flight involves embodied experimentation with no goal or predictable outcome.

Line of flight as the trajectory of ontogenesis differs from the lines of rigid and supple segmentarity in that it is based on the workings of affects, not representation, where haecceities are lost in a grid of hierarchical classification and where difference is qualified by identity and cannot be contemplated without the preceding identity.⁹ While representational schemes of subjectivation begin with identity labels in a top-down manner, subjectivation based on affect begins with the specificities of an individual or body. As mentioned before, in the Spinozian Deleuzian definition, “A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity,” and ultimately, it is a network of relations (Deleuze, *Spinoza* 127). The specificities of a body have nothing to do with its species or genre. Abandoning these representational concepts, Deleuze conceptualizes a body as speed and affect, longitude and latitude:

We call longitude of a body the set of relations of speed and slowness, of motion and rest, between particles that compose it from this point of view, that is, between *unformed elements*. We call latitude the set of affects that occupy a body at each moment, that is, the intensive states of an *anonymous force* (force to exist, capacity for being affected). In this way we construct the map of a body. (127-28)

This definition frees a body from its form and substance, rendering it a force, an affectivity. It also ensures that a body is never fully formed but always a changing collectivity of dynamics. In this way, ontology is replaced by ethology: a body is defined by its behavior, by what it affects and what affects it, i.e., by its relations with other bodies or what Deleuze and Guattari call “assemblages.”

The line of flight, which describes the trajectory of coming into composition with other bodies, is not an operation on the level of “major dualist oppositions” between representational categories (Deleuze and Guattari 208). It is necessarily an

⁹ Representation here is to be understood in the Aristotelian sense. In Aristotle’s *Categories*, a species is classified according to its genus and differentia (4-6; ch. 5 and ch. 6). The human being as the rational animal is different from cats and dogs as irrational animals but all of them share the genus “animals.” Individual difference is suppressed by the resemblance between the instances of the same species. Each person is just like the next, as all are united under the label “humans.”

embodied exchange of affects. Unlike lines of rigid segmentarity and supple segmentarity, which have a specific category as their destination—legal adulthood, a profession, or a political party, the line of flight involves impersonal intensities for which no prescriptive knowledge exists since they are subliminal to representation. The line of flight is a line of escape with open-ended results. Fortuitous rather than programmatic, it is “as if something carried us away, across our segments, but also across our thresholds, towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent” (Deleuze and Parnet 125).

Such an unexpected line of flight characterizes Coleman’s second major subjectivation and Zuckerman’s re-engagement with society. Two years after the “spooks” fiasco, the 71-year-old Coleman meets Faunia and begins a romantic relationship with her. In contrast to his passing, Coleman’s second transformation is unplanned and unexpected—a genuine creation taking place on the line of flight. While his marriage to Iris was strategic, his love affair with Faunia is by no means an autonomous choice. It comes “out of nowhere, completely unexpected, even unwanted” (Roth, *Human* 26). What Coleman wants at the time is to clear his name by finishing *Spooks*, a self-vindicating memoir of the racial slur incident that he has spent two years writing.

Falling in love with Faunia has made him give up his personal vendetta and put the incident all behind him. What becomes important for Coleman is the thrill of living, of life itself: “He’s more than happy—he’s thrilled, and he’s bound, deeply bound to her already, because of the thrill” (33).¹⁰ Instead of forming connections that comply with his personal project, as in marrying Iris to ensure the success of his passing, Coleman experiences subjectivation through an serendipitous, embodied encounter with Faunia: “I went to pick up my mail at the end of the day and there she was, mopping the floor” (27). The embodied manner in which Faunia appears to Coleman stands in sharp contrast to the discursive manner that Iris did when they first met: “All that afternoon she told Coleman folklorishly enchanting stories” about her personal history (128). As her name suggests, Faunia is a figure of non-human animality. Her illiteracy, her refusal to participate in cultural discourse—she once storms out of the room when Coleman tries to read newspapers to her, and her occupation as a farmhand demonstrates her affinity with the non-representational, material realm (234).

¹⁰ The fact that Coleman dies soon after his genuinely creative subjectivation seems to imply that affective ontogenesis leads to destruction. In fact, however, Coleman’s death does not result from his embodied subjectivation but is a distant consequence of his racial passing. Having lived his adult life as a Jew, Coleman is also “killed as a Jew,” murdered along with Faunia by her anti-Semitic ex-husband, Les Farley (Roth, *Human* 325). Coleman’s untimely death, Zuckerman remarks, is “another of the problems of impersonation” (325).

Coleman's transformation comes from falling in love with Faunia while watching her dance.¹¹ Unlike Iris, who intrigues Coleman with her "intellect" and her three-hour-long verbal "comedy" about her upbringing (129), Faunia captivates him with her nude dance that displays not her biography but the texture of her body, highlighted by her various scars, bruises, bites, stings, and rough and reddened patches of skin (226). While brimming with material affects, the dance, she affirms, signifies nothing: "don't look at me now like I'm good for something other than this. Something more than this" (229). She warns Coleman: "Don't do that Hold on this. Don't think about anything else Don't take it somewhere else, Coleman. This is all we're here to do" (229). The dance also marks a break from temporal representation, as Faunia goes on to admonish Coleman: "Don't think it's about tomorrow. Close all the doors, before and after. All the social ways of thinking, shut 'em down I can keep dancing, if that's the deal. The secret little moment—if that's the whole deal. That slice you get. That slice out of time. It's no more than that, and I hope you know it" (229). Taking her dance outside of commonsensical, chronological time, Faunia frees Coleman from representational thinking, launching him onto the transformative line of flight.

Coleman's transformation on a line of flight increases his power to affect, to connect with other individuals and bring changes into the world, and he does so when he draws Zuckerman out of his moribund seclusion—also through a dance. One sultry summer evening, when Zuckerman visits him at home, Coleman hears Frank Sinatra singing "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" on the radio and suddenly feels an irrepressible urge to dance to the music (24). He asks Zuckerman to dance with him. As if infected with Coleman's exuberance, Zuckerman uncharacteristically accepts the unconventional invitation. As they begin to dance, no longer exchanging words, they become immersed in an embodied, affective exchange: "I gave him my hand and let him place his arm around my back and push me dreamily around that old bluestone floor Coleman was wearing only his denim shorts and my hand rested easily on his warm back as if it were the back of a dog or a horse" (26). The reference to non-human animals highlights the non-discursive nature of the dance, showing it to be an event on the level of material intensities rather than representation or discourse. It is the impromptu fox trot danced with the shirtless Coleman to the jazz song that rebuilds the "entanglement with life" from which he fled years ago (44). As Zuckerman recalls, "Coleman Silk danced me right back into life" (45). The affective exchange in the unpremeditated, adventitious dance increases Zuckerman's capacity to act, that

¹¹ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of the essay for drawing my attention to the importance of the relationship between Coleman and Faunia.

is, the creative energy for embodied experimentation. As he dances with Coleman, he feels “a thoughtless delight in just being alive, . . . the kind of delight you take as a child when you first learn to play a tune with a comb and toilet paper” (26).

The dance loosens Zuckerman’s grip on his prized subjective autonomy and his vigilance against anything that betrays his embodiment. After he returns home, Zuckerman finds urine stains on his trousers and realizes, “I’d been so engaged by Coleman and his story that I’d failed to monitor myself” (36). However, Zuckerman is not distressed by the mishap, because he has realized that life is more than the “communications of a solitary mind with itself,” that life is embodied (44). When Coleman confides in him about his love affair with Faunia after the dance, Zuckerman’s response is no longer that of a hermit living only the sterilized life of the mind but someone who acknowledges the embodiment of life: “How can one say, ‘No, this isn’t a part of life,’ since it always is? The contaminant of sex, the redeeming corruption that de-idealizes the species and keeps us everlastingly mindful of the matter we are,” Zuckerman avers (37).

Subjectivation through affect is truly creative because it is not based on any preconception on the part of the individual. In fact, the individual, like Zuckerman in the dance scene, is rendered passive, the exact opposite of the autonomous liberal humanist subject. As mentioned before, affective capacity is “the capacity that a body has to form specific relations” (Buchanan 80). This capacity is double-sided, both active and passive. Coleman—who was passive, or “unresisting,” in his encounter with Faunia in the sense that he didn’t autonomously seek her out according to his own agenda, as he did with Iris—is affectively active in the dance, whereas Zuckerman is affectively passive, accepting his friend’s initiation to affective engagement (227). Zuckerman’s passivity does not mean that he is lacking in affective capacity. On the contrary, it is passivity and receptivity that allow an individual to go through ontological renewal.

As Mark Bonta and John Protevi point out, the French verb “pouvoir” (“can” or “to be able to”) in Deleuze and Guattari’s affective definition of the body—“We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do [ce qu’il peut]”—has both passive and active meanings, so the affective capacity of a body includes both “‘passive’ and ‘active’ senses of affect” (Deleuze and Guattari 257; Bonta and Protevi 50). Alan Bourassa similarly notes, “In terms of a singular being, affect is what the being is capable of, but equally what it is capable of experiencing or undergoing” (47). Terence Blake even stresses the importance of the passive aspect of affect to creation, saying that, in the transformation of an individual, “the key factor is not one of action but of receptivity.” The passive, receptive power of the body, its ability to be affected, is significant because it helps undo established patterns in thought and behavior. The creative line of flight requires such passivity

and receptivity. "One is not consciously passing through the line of flight," but is rather being passed through by it (Semetsky 334). To bring about creation, the individual has to be actively passive, in a sense, and subject itself to the affects of other individuals.

What reading dead authors in his silent cabin on Madamaska Mountain in the Berkshires couldn't do for him, Zuckerman achieves accidentally by dancing with Coleman. He immediately becomes affectively responsive and even active, open to the unfamiliar and spontaneous. "We are enjoying ourselves now I was gushing and I knew it. I surprised myself with my eagerness to please, felt myself saying too much," Zuckerman remembers (Roth, *Human* 43). He can't help but "act as you don't normally do and a lot more openly than you may even want to" (43). Zuckerman surprises himself because what is coming alive is a new, unrecognizable self: "to create" ontologically, "One has to lose one's identity, one's face, in it. One has to disappear, to become unknown" (Deleuze and Parnet 45).

In a virtuous circle, forging new relations expands one's affective capacity, promoting further connections, that is, further ontogenesis. As Zuckerman recalls, "I ceased being able to live apart from the turbulence and intensity that I had fled. I did no more than find a friend, and all the world's malice came rushing in" (Roth, *Human* 45). His relationship with Coleman connects Zuckerman to new artistic possibilities. "Indeed, the dance that sealed our friendship was also what made his disaster my subject. And made his disguise my subject," Zuckerman reflects (45). It is because of his closeness to Coleman that Ernestine, who attends Coleman's funeral anonymously, reveals her true identity to Zuckerman. Inspired by Ernestine's revelation about Coleman's passing, Zuckerman begins writing *The Human Stain*.

Zuckerman's renewed creativity at the end of *The Human Stain* consists not just in writing a new book but, more importantly, the continual expansion of his affective capability. When he comes across Les Farley, Faunia's jealous ex-husband, who has likely caused Faunia and Coleman's fatal car accident, Zuckerman does not flinch from physical proximity with the dangerous man: "The *fact* of him drew me on. This was not speculation. This was not meditation. . . . This was the thing itself. The laws of caution that, outside my work, had ruled my life so strictly for the last five years were suddenly suspended" (350). Caution was what kept Zuckerman within the confines of reclusion and rigid segmentarity. Now, with replenished affective capacity, he welcomes the opportunity for an embodied connection with the unknown in the form of Les Farley. As the novel draws to a close, Zuckerman has made Les's acquaintance and is on his way to East Orange to have a Sunday dinner with Ernestine and Coleman's family. As he embarks on the open highway network, Zuckerman is also reengaging himself with the com-

plexity of life, with its unforeseeable lines of flight lying in wait for him.

This essay has dwelt on the concept of the subject in Roth and shown that throughout the different stages of his writing career, Roth has expressed a firm belief in embodiment. Drawing on Deleuze's affect theory, where individuals experience becoming through the exchange of affects—the minute, preperceptual material intensities—this essay has provided a reading of *The Human Stain* showing that Coleman Silk's passing at 19 and Zuckerman's self-imposed reclusion are based on the humanist belief in the autonomous subject combined with a discursive conception of subjectivity, whereas Coleman's abandonment of his vindication project following his love affair with Faunia at 71 and Zuckerman's revitalization through dancing with Coleman are embodied ontological renewals on the experimental, Deleuzian line of flight. In demonstrating this point, this essay fills a gap in previous criticism of *The Human Stain*: Roth not only acknowledges the importance of macro-level material forces in subjectivation but also the pre-personal, non-representational quantum level of affective materiality as ontologically creative.

By recognizing Roth's attention to the creativity of matter or material intensities, this essay hopes to open up a new direction for the development of Roth scholarship, especially in the area of Roth's later works. Before his retirement at the age of 80, Roth's literary output in the 2000s, following the publication of *The Human Stain*, consists mainly of geriatric novels—*The Dying Animal*, *Everyman*, *Exit Ghost*, and *The Humbling*—characterized by aging protagonists who manifest an “unremitting materialism” regarding mortality (Metcalf). Another of his recent works *Nemesis* deals with the materiality of the body through its depiction of a disfiguring and sometimes fatal disease from the perspective of a protagonist distinguished initially by his physical strength and athletic achievements.¹² Matter abounds in *Indignation*, whose young protagonist spends his teenage years helping out in his family's kosher butchery, in some viscerally detailed descriptions of animal slaughtering. It seems that the later Roth has a switch of focus from the political and the historical to the embodied and the visceral. As he turns his attention to the materiality of the aging body, the infected body, and the killing of animals and humans, how does Roth conceive of matter itself? Does he still uphold the commonsensical concept of matter as passive? If the works analyzed in this essay—

¹² As mentioned before, affective mobility, which allows passing as the process of becoming—rather than passing as reallocation into a different identity category, as exemplified by racial passing, is what Deleuze, inspired by Nietzsche, calls “health.” Paradoxically, this kind of health is brought on by illness in the sense of a limiting, debilitating force, since illnesses “separate us from our power but at the same time they give us another power, ‘dangerous’ and ‘interesting’.” They bring us new feelings and teach us new ways of being affected” (*Nietzsche* 66). Aging, disease, and disabilities may spark positive ontogenesis by evoking health. See also Deleuze, “Literature” 3-4.

the early story “Novotny’s Pain,” the mid-career *The Anatomy Lesson*, and the late novel *The Human Stain*—serve as a bellwether, he must be venturing toward the new materialist emphasis on the agency of matter. With that said, these questions still deserve to be explored comprehensively in the future. All in all, I hope this essay has made its contribution to leading scholarly discussion in this direction.

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舞出新生：菲利普羅斯《人性污點》中的身動力個體生成

摘要

菲利普羅斯 (Philip Roth) 於二〇〇〇年出版的小說《人性污點》(The Human Stain) 被認為是一部關於種族變身 (Racial Passing) 的小說。然而，這樣的觀點假設了柯曼席爾克是故事的唯一主角，而忽略了敘事者納森祖克曼的重要性。這部小說除了種族變身的主題外，另一個重點是祖克曼如何在與科爾曼跳了一支舞之後，拋棄隱居的生活型態，經歷個體轉變而重新融入人際關係。因此，羅斯在《人性污點》中要探討的，不僅是種族變身這個歷史現象，而是個體生成 (Ontogenesis) 這個更深層的問題。

為理解小說中的個體生成現象，本文提出身動力理論 (Affect Theory) 的物質主義觀點，強調主體的體現性 (Embodiment)，認為個體再生源自於物質本身的創造性。本文認為，科爾曼十九歲時的種族變身和祖克曼的山中隱居，都是根基於現代人本主義自我創造的概念和後現代的身體文本化，如此去身體化的主體轉變使生命失去創造力。相較之下，七十一歲的科爾曼在遇見弗妮雅之後的生命轉變，以及祖克曼在與科爾曼跳舞後，重新與他人連結的新生過程，可說是體現性的、源自身動力的個體再生，能夠持續產生開放性和創造性。

關鍵字：菲利普羅斯、《人性污點》、身動力、體現性、個體生成